

2. The Address

(Marga Minco)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marga Minco who was born in 1920 grew up in a Jewish family of five children in Breda. Unlike her sisters, brothers and parents, she escaped being arrested and went into hiding during World War II. She made her literary debut in 1957 with 'Bitter Herbs'. *De Andere Kant* (The Other Side) was penned in 1959. At present, Minco lives and works in Amsterdam.

BACKGROUND

WAR OF HOLLAND

The German invasion of Holland began in 1940. Holland expected to remain neutral as it had done during the First World War. However, the occupation was swift and after fierce fighting, Holland was forced to surrender. The Dutch Jews suffered persecution. The Jewish population in Holland in 1940 was about 1,40,000 of whom 24,000 were refugees. Amsterdam had the largest Jewish Community of 90,000. Most were poor and did semi or unskilled work. Between 1940 and 1941 Jews were removed from public life and their land was sold to non-jews. The first mass arrests of Jews began in 1941. Their areas were raided and on 22nd February, 400 of them were taken away, never to return. In June, another 230 Jews, mainly refugees, suddenly disappeared. Nazi troops were called in to restore order. From July 1942 unemployed Jewish men were deported and sent to Nazi concentration camps. Soon whole families were summoned and this was when some of them went into hiding.

Life for Dutch people was becoming harder, families were left without fathers and sons, everything became scarce, even ordinary

household goods like soap and fuel. By the middle of 1944 there was a complete breakdown of services in Holland. There was no transport, no electricity and no telephone service. Diseases became wide spread thus increasing the death rate.

The war and occupation caused the deaths of 2,40,000 Dutch people, 1,06,000 of whom were Jews. The act of genocide against the Jews were classified by the Allies War Crimes trials as "crimes against humanity".

NOTES

- **Narrator's first visit to 46 Marconi Street**
 - Mrs Dorling shows no sign of recognition which seems pretentious
 - Narrator recognises her mother's green knitted cardigan worn by the lady at that time
 - Mrs Dorling expresses her surprise at the survival of the narrator, who, she thought had been dead along with her mother in the War
 - she refuses to talk to the girl
 - probably, she fears that the girl might ask for her mother's belongings
- **Narrator's Mother's acquaintance with Mrs Dorling**
 - an old acquaintance of the narrator's mother, Mrs Dorling had renewed contact with the former after a long time
 - regular visits by Mrs Dorling to her mother
 - the lady had started carrying away things from the narrator's house
 - Mrs Dorling suggested that she would keep the things to protect them if narrator's mother had to leave the house due to the war
 - valuable possessions including table silver, crockery, antique plates, vases were all taken away

- size and shape of things would not affect her taking them away to her home
- **Narrator's visit for her mother's belongings**
 - the narrator's only purpose of visit : Mother's belongings
 - she earlier intended not to upset herself with old memories of a 'precious time'
- **Narrator's stream of thoughts**
 - full of ambiguous thoughts, struggle inside and predicament
 - had come back after a long time and thought
 - she was not interested in her mother's things stored at Number 46, Marconi street
 - she was afraid of confronting her Mother's belongings
 - she feared her memories would connect themselves to her mother who was no more
 - however, when things went back to normal, after the war, she became curious about all the possessions
 - now she wanted to see them, touch them and remember them
- **Mother's belongings bring back old memories**
 - green knitted cardigan with wooden buttons now faded with use
 - Hanukkah candle-holder which was never used because it was cumbersome
 - woollen table-cloth with a burn mark
 - white tea-pot with a gold border on its lid
 - antique box for spoons
 - still life with an apple on the pewter plate
 - the spoons, forks, knives – all made of silver
- **The narrator wants to forget the address**
 - the girl was horrified to see her mother's belongings in a place unknown to her

- mother's belongings seemed oppressive in the strange atmosphere
- old memories came flooding back to her
- the narrator felt sad at the underestimated value of her mother's belongings
- she did not want to remember the address and go back to it again
- value of her mother's belongings was lost for her
- objects linked in memory lose their importance, when cut off from them, they are seen in strange surroundings
- the narrator felt that she had no place for them either in her home or in her heart
- the narrator decided to forget the past and move on in life

GLOSSARY

- poignant - painful, sad
- chink - narrow opening or crack
- fleetingly - for a very short time
- jamb - side post of a doorway or window
- apparently - obviously
- lugging - carrying or dragging with great effort
- crick - painful stiff feeling in the neck or back
- reprovngly - reprimandngly, scoldngly
- confronted - forced to face something
- endured - remained in existence, suffered patiently
- errand - short journey made to deliver or collect something
- cumbersome - difficult to carry or use through size or weight
- apprehend - distressed, made anxious

- smuggy - unpleasantly warm or humid
- severed - put on end to (connection or relationship)
- resolved - determined

TITLE

"The Address" refers to Number 46, Marconi Street, which has a strange kind of live attraction and attachment for the narrator. It was at that address that her mother's belongings were 'stored safely'. The narrator wanted to visit the given address to see, touch and remember her mother through her possessions left behind by her.

Strangely, through all the trials and tribulations that the narrator must have gone through due to the war in Holland, she did not forget the address told to her by her mother only once. It was here that Mrs Dorling lived. She had taken away the narrator's mother's things on the pretext of preserving them for her if she had to leave the house because of the arrests of the Jews. It was when the narrator had wanted to know from her mother how far the lady lived, that she had replied 'In Marconi Street, Number 46. Remember that'. Probably Mrs S, the narrator's mother, doubting her return to that place, wanted her daughter to come back for her things. Of course, the daughter did remember and come back, not once but twice. She did get to see her mother's things, not stored but being used, and felt repulsed at their being in a strange atmosphere. She left the place intending to forget 'the address' and to move on with life.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

(to be answered in about 40 words each)

- Q1. What was the narrator in the story "The Address" in search of? Why?**

The narrator was in search of her mother's belongings. Having survived the War of Holland, she wanted to find the things which she knew Mrs Dorling had taken away from her mother to keep them in safe custody with her.

- Q2. What kind of reception did the narrator get at No. 46, Marconi Street?**

When the narrator asked the lady at 46, Marconi Street if she still knew her, she got a reply in the negative. The narrator gave her identity as Mrs S's daughter but still the lady showed no sign of recognition. Actually Mrs Dorling was intentionally refusing to recognise the narrator.

- Q3. Why did the narrator have doubts about the address?**

The narrator, on not being recognised, thought that she was probably mistaken in coming to the house number 46 in Marconi Street. She had seen the lady living in the same address years ago but only once and that too fleetingly. The narrator feared that she had probably rung the wrong bell.

- Q4. How did the narrator realise that she had come to the right address?**

As the lady left the door and stepped to one side, the narrator got a glimpse of her mother's green knitted cardigan with wooden buttons that Mrs Dorling had on her. On realizing that the narrator had recognised the cardigan belonging to be her mother's, the lady once again tried to hide herself behind the door.

- Q5. Why did the lady at 46, Marconi Street refuse to see the narrator?**

Mrs Dorling of 46, Marconi Street had recognised the narrator as the daughter of the woman whose numerous valuable

possessions she had brought to her house. Originally, she had done so to save the things from the Nazis but when the narrator's mother did come to collect them she was making full use of them. She refused to let in the narrator fearing that she would see her mother's things and would want to take them back.

Q6. Was the narrator right in noticing the changed state of the rooms in her mother's house? Why was it so?

The narrator was observant enough to perceive that a number of things were missing from the rooms. It was then that her mother told her about Mrs Dorling, who had been taking them away to keep them safely in case they had to leave. Mrs Dorling was a regular visitor and each time she left she would take away something with her. Thus she had taken the silver, antique plates, crockery, vases and all other nice things belonging to the narrator's mother.

Q7. Why did the narrator's mother allow Mrs Dorling to take away many precious things from the home?

Mrs S, the narrator's mother and Mrs Dorling had known each other for quite some time. So, when Mrs Dorling offered to take away Mrs S's things to safely keep them till the war last, Mrs S readily agreed in good faith. Little did she knew that Mrs Dorling's suggestion was actuated by her greed more than her desire to help an acquaintance.

Q8. What made Mrs Dorling carry away the narrator's mother's belongings - greed or true concern? How can you say so?

Nothing but greed made Mrs Dorling carry away all the valuable and nice possessions of the narrator's mother. She did this even at the risk of injuring herself or being arrested. However, instead of safely keeping the things, she was making full use of them and had also put up the antique plates on the

wall. Her daughter even admitted to eating off those plates. It was the fear of losing the things that made Mrs Dorling deny the narrator an entry into her house.

Q9. The narrator's mother failed to see through the clever manipulation of Mrs Dorling? Why?

The narrator's mother agreed to Mrs Dorling's offer to safeguard her belongings. She could not say no to her. The lady had intended to usurp those things out of greed. Simple, well meaning and credulous as she was she failed to see through the cunning trick of Mrs Dorling.

Q10. What were the narrator's thoughts while she was on her way back from her first visit to 46, Marconi Street?

The narrator did not wish to go anywhere on her way back from 46, Marconi Street. She did not want to upset herself with the sight of streets and houses full of memories from a precious time in her past when her mother was alive.

Q11. The narrator was initially hesitant of going to 'the address'. Why?

The narrator had visited 46, Marconi Street after a long wait. Soon after the Liberation, when she should have returned to the place, she became apprehensive of facing things that would bring back memories of all that no longer existed, including her mother and her association with her possessions. Moreover, the things which were now being used by others had lost their value for her. Also, she was not sure whether she would be recognised.

Q12. What was the narrator's perception of her mother's belongings lying with Mrs Dorling? Why was it so?

The narrator was of the view that her mother's belongings would be lying hidden away in cupboards and boxes and waiting endlessly in vain to be put back in their place again. Unlike human beings, these things, the narrator felt, had

endured so many years because they were 'things'. She thought so because her mother had told her that Mrs Dorling would keep them with her safely till the time they *i.e.* she and her mother returned.

Q13. 'I stopped, horrified. I was in a room I knew and did not know'. Why did the narrator feel horrified?

The narrator had entered the living room from the passage where she had seen her mother's old fashioned Hanukkah candle-holder. Inside the living room she saw herself standing amidst her mother's belongings - all those things, that she had come to see but strangely these oppressed her because they were in an unfamiliar and strange atmosphere. Moreover, they were very tastelessly arranged among ugly and untidy surroundings.

Q14. Why did Mrs Dorling's daughter bring back a flood of memories to the narrator?

The living room where the narrator sat had quite a few things, belonging to her mother. While Mrs Dorling's daughter was serving tea, the narrator noticed her mother's white tea-pot that had a golden border on the lid. The cutlery box, an antique piece, and the silver in it reminded the narrator of her mother once asking her to help her polish it. Mrs Dorling's daughter also told the narrator that the antique plates on the wall (belonging to the narrator's mother) were used for everything and that they had even eaten off them.

Q15. Why did the narrator decide never to come back to the address?

The narrator was oppressed to see her mother's belongings in strange surroundings. She did not like the fact that someone else was using them. She did not want to come back because all the things had lost their values because of the broken connection of

many years. Besides she could not possibly keep them in her small rented accommodation.

Q16. 'Of all the things I had to forget, that would be the easiest'. What is the significance of the narrator's statement?

The narrator resolved to forget the address as she did not want to come back to the objects that evoked memories of her earlier life and precious times. She decided to leave the past behind and move on. Life for her had been all about forgetting, and she thought that forgetting and severing ties with all that was her mother's in number 46, Marconi Street, would be the easiest thing to do.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

(to be answered in about 120 – 150 words each)

Q1. What intentions did Mrs Dorling initially have when she carried away the belongings of the narrator's mother? How did they change later? What does this show about her character and values?

I think initially it was a good intention which made Mrs Dorling carry away all the valuable and nice possessions of the narrator's mother. She wanted to help a friend and neighbour in distress. She did this even at the risk of injuring herself or being arrested. However, later on greed made her keep the things to herself. Instead of returning them she began making full use of them as if they were her own. She had even put up the antique plates on the wall. Her daughter even admitted to eating off those plates.

Thus, the reader gets the impression that right from the beginning Mrs Dorling intended to usurp those things out of greed. She must have presumed that after war the mother and daughter would never return home, and so she wouldn't have to return all

those precious things. Thus, Mrs Dorling turns out to be a cunning, selfish and greedy woman.

Q2. What family values prompted the narrator to visit 46, Marconi Street? What light does this visit reflect on her character and her relationship with her mother?

"The Address" is a poignant tale of a mother and her daughter who are forced to leave home because of war. The daughter is the only survivor of war out of the family of seven. After the war she decided to go to 46, Marconi Street to have a look at her mother's belongings that Mrs Dorling, Mrs S's old acquaintance had taken to her house during the pre-war days to keep them in safe custody. It was not the narrator's materialistic approach but a sentimental attachment to her late mother's belongings that took her to 46, Marconi Street.

This visit shows the daughter's sensitivity and her attachment with her mother. She feels it her moral responsibility to retrieve what belonged to her late mother so that she could relive the memories of her past.

Q3. What negative values of her character are reflected when Mrs Dorling refused to recognize Mrs S's daughter and showed no signs of remembering Mrs S?

It is surprising that instead of feeling happy on seeing Mrs S's daughter, Mrs Dorling appeared to be shocked and surprised to see her. She had not expected the return of the narrator or her mother. She had probably taken them for dead. Having been the custodian of the narrator's mother's belonging for years, she had perhaps become greedy and took them to be her own. Apparently she had made full use of the narrator's mother's belongings and now her greed and selfishness stood in the way of her returning them to the rightful owner.

In fact she was so mean that she refused to recognize the narrator and showed no signs of having any memory of Mrs S. She even refused to receive the narrator into her house on the pretext of paucity of time. What evil can greed turn people into!

Q4. Why did the narrator of the story "The Address" want to forget the address? Or (Textual)

Rather than clinging to the materialistic objects of past that bring a shadow of gloom in your present, it is better to sever link with the past and move on in life. Discuss what values does one need to have in order to have such an approach?

Realizing that a sentimental attachment to her mother's belongings would do her no good, the narrator decided to forget the address Number 46, Marconi Street that she had carried in her mind for years.

For a few years after the Liberation, the narrator was not interested in her mother's stored stuff. But when the situation came back to normal, she became curious about the possessions and went to see them. However, the very sight of her mother's things lying in the unfamiliar surroundings and being ill-used by Mrs Dorling and her daughter left the narrator horrified. She could not bear to see Mrs Dorling's daughter constantly using and talking endlessly of all that once belonged to her mother. She knew that the recollection of these objects would upset her and cast a gloom on her present. So she decided, then and there, to sever all ties with the past. The things for which the address remained in her subconscious for so long had lost their value for her. She resolved to move on with life.

Such an approach to life requires a large, generous heart, forgiveness and an ability to overcome greed. It also requires a certain amount of 'let go' attitude, a sense of resignation and

reconciliation, the ability to take everything in one's stride and a strong urge to move on in life.

- Q5. "The Address" is a story of human predicament that follows war. Comment. Or (Textual)

What is the theme of the story "The Address"?

"The Address" is a narrative that brings out the heart rending consequences of war which make one part with dear ones and with all that is associated with the lost ones. The narrator, a victim of the difficult times heaped upon by the war, gives a poignant account of her attempt to see her mother's belongings.

Life in the times of war was so uncertain and pathetic for the Jews that they lived in constant fear of being arrested, looted or sent away to concentration camps. They had to face the prejudice and hatred of the society due to no fault of theirs. It was this uncertainty that made selfish people like Mrs Dorling take advantage of the poor Jews.

The narrator's comment on her mother's possessions, "... had endured all those years because they were 'things' " brings forth the sorrowful aspect of human life, which can be snuffed out in no time in comparison to such things. She loses her mother to the war in Holland but wants to connect herself to the past through her things because memories of good old days continue to haunt her. However, on realizing that her effort to revive links with her past would affect her present adversely, she makes her mind to give up this desire also. With a sense of resignation, she decides to bear this tragic after-effect of the war as she had borne its other horrors.

- Q6. Though her mother's belongings were precious to her, the narrator decides to forget them and moves ahead in life. What valuable lesson can we learn from her decision to do so?

At first the narrator attached a lot of importance to her mother's belongings that were lying in Mrs. Dorling's custody, for they were given to the lady for their safe upkeep during the war and were meant to be reclaimed after it was over. Moreover, they were precious, too. The cutlery, for example, was silver and there were many artistic things, too. When the narrator first visited Mrs. Dorling to get her mother's things back, she realized that the lady had been using them as her own and did not have the intention of returning them. She expressed shock on seeing the narrator, for she had believed that the narrator and her family had perished in the war. She did not welcome the narrator into her home and told her to come another time. This left the narrator very disappointed. She visited the lady one more time but found she was not at home. Her little daughter admitted her in, enquired if she would like to have some tea, while the narrator was busy admiring her mother's things that were all over the room. It was at that moment that she realized that she should give up her claim on those things. The war had taught her to live in penury and not to attach importance to possessions. Her mother was no more with her, and her belongings too perhaps had ceased to have any value for her. Like the Bishop who readily gave away his candlesticks, the narrator decided to let her mother's belongings lie with Mrs. Dorling and her daughter.

The narrator's decision holds out some very important lessons for us. One, never say die and keep taking things in our stride. Two, we should let bygones be bygones. The past is dead and gone. We should not allow it to adversely affect our present or determine our future. Three, greed breeds ill-will, selfishness and fear. It must be overcome at any cost.

- Q7. The story is divided into pre-War and post-War times. What hardships do you think the girl underwent during these times?

(Textual)

'The Address' is a poignant tale of a mother and her daughter who are forced to leave home because of war. The narrative makes it apparent that the daughter used to stay away from her mother, probably because of the war and to earn a living for the two of them. The narrator's mother lived a lonely life but got some company when Mrs Dorling, an old acquaintance, renewed her contact with her. She failed to see the motive behind the lady's visits who would come regularly and carry away her nice collection of things. It was probably the fear of Nazis confiscating her nice things that made Mrs S agree to part with them.

The post-war part of the story shows the daughter left alone after her mother's death. The house they lived in and the things belonging to her mother bring back memories of her mother and her past. She decided to retrieve her mother's possessions and to see them, touch them and remember the precious time spent with her. That is why she visited Number 46, Marconi Street. However, these things kept and used in a very pathetic manner and condition so put off the narrator that she no longer wanted them.

Anyway, she could not keep them all with her for the conditions had been bad after the war and Liberation had brought in new miseries in its wake. There was the constant fear of these things to be plundered or confiscated. So the narrator decided to move on in life without her mother's precious belongings.

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